

2 SITE HISTORY

Site history information was obtained from the OESER Cedar Company RI report (E&E 2002a and references therein) and personal communication with City and Whatcom County personnel. Current property owners within the Park site area are shown on Figure 1-1. The approximate locations of relevant historical activities within the Park boundaries are shown on Figure 2-1.

Recent sampling activities in the Park by Ecology (2004) have uncovered a previously unknown shell midden deposit. The extent of the shell midden deposit, located downstream of the Marine Drive Bridge, is currently unknown. It is also possible that archaeological deposits could be present in other areas of the park.

The first reported development in the area of Little Squalicum Creek (the Creek) was by Edward Eldridge in 1853, under the 320-acre Eldridge Donation Claim. During the late 1800s, most of the area was used by the Eldridge family for dairy farming and ranching. The railway that runs along the shoreline of Bellingham Bay was first developed around 1890. The Eldridge family deeded portions of the uplands and tidelands to Olympic Cement Company in 1911 (now the Tilbury Cement Company). This deed included land for the pier and former rail bed that extends along the west side of the Creek ravine. An old pump house that supplied water from a spring along the creek to the cement plant is located downstream of the Marine Drive Bridge stormwater discharge point. The plant discontinued pumping of spring water for plant use in the 1950s. In 1925, the Eldridge family sold the property now occupied by the OESER Company to the Utah and Idaho Sugar Company (U&I). The sale included an easement for construction of a drain to convey sugar-processing wastes through the creek into the tidelands of Bellingham Bay. The plant remained in operation into the early 1940s, reportedly closing in 1942. During the 1940s and 1950s, a commercial plant nursery was located to the west of the Creek.

In 1932, the Eldridge family granted the Marietta Township mining rights to the gravel within the ravine. Sand and gravel were later mined by the Eiford Company until the late 1960s. In some places within the ravine over 20 ft of native soils were mined for its sand and gravel. Some of the ditches dug to facilitate drainage remain in place today. Much of the creek's original course was diverted into these ditches. The entire ravine was altered substantially from natural conditions with rerouting of the original creek bed and significant changes to the soils and lithology (e.g., backfilling of gravel pit and wash pond excavations, temporary road maintenance, and rail bed and track placement). Temporary basins were dug for gravel washing and reportedly filled with groundwater, both seasonally and, in some cases, year-round. After mining, the land was leased to Mt. Baker Plywood for raw log storage during the early 1970s. Logs were transported to and from the ravine via the beach.

In 1943, the Eldridge family sold a portion of the upper area of the creek ravine to the Tiscornia family who used the land for farming and grazing livestock. The land was obtained by the Bellingham School District in 1955, which subsequently deeded the land in 1993 to the Washington State Board for Community Colleges and Technical Colleges. Bellingham Technical College (BTC), formerly the Bellingham Vocational Technical Institute established here in 1957, is currently located on this 21-acre site. Various portions of the creek, including areas extensively mined for sand and gravel and used for log storage, were deeded to the Whatcom County Park Board by several individuals as well as the school district.

Hugh Eldridge deeded the tidelands onto which the Creek flows to the Port of Bellingham (Port) in 1927. A 60-ft right-of-way west of the Marine Drive Bridge was deeded to the Port in 1956, but was never developed or used by the Port. The fee to this right-of-way was purchased by the City in 2001. In the mid 1960s, construction debris and old furnishings were reportedly dumped in a small area near the east boundary of the ravine, which is now a BTC parking lot. Minor amounts of residential and commercial garbage and refuse may have also been placed in this area based on personal communication with City employees and information provided on a 1963 aerial photo.

In 1977, the City constructed an underground stormwater pipeline through the upper area of the ravine. Stormwater from approximately 3 square miles of the Birchwood neighborhood, including the BTC parking lot, is conveyed through the 36-inch underground pipeline and discharged into the creek. Since 2002, stormwater from the BTC parking lot is directed through a filtering system (reportedly composted leaf media) before discharging into the creek. Although water is diverted directly into the Birchwood neighborhood stormwater pipeline during larger rainstorms (greater than 6-month storm), most runoff (approximately 90%) is treated before discharging to the creek (Hunter 2004, pers. comm.).

The City owns 7.8 acres of the Park and leases 12.3 acres of County-owned property at the site. Currently, an agreement between the City Parks and Recreation Department and Whatcom County Parks Department stipulates that the City must manage and operate the area as a park site for 35 years (to about 2025), with a renewal provision for another 35 years.

The OESER Cedar Company (currently known as the OESER Company) purchased the nearby U&I property in 1943. The OESER Company manufactures poles for utility companies. In records dating back to 1953, the process included segregating poles by length and class, incising some or all of the poles, and subjecting them to “oil treatment” using creosote. Finished poles were shipped offsite by rail. In 1965, the company also started treating wood using 5% pentachlorophenol (PCP) in an oil-based solvent (Diesel No. 2). OESER stopped using creosote to treat wood in the early 1980s but PCP treatment

continues to be utilized at the facility. A detailed description of the wood treatment processes used by the OESER Company is presented in the OESER RI (E&E 2002a).

The OESER site has discharged process wastewater or contaminated stormwater to the Creek since start of operations in the late 1940s. The water enters an underground stormwater line originating in the Birchwood neighborhood that crosses the OESER Company property and then discharges into the creek. This OESER/Birchwood neighborhood drainage enters the creek adjacent to the outfall from the Birchwood neighborhood drainage to the east (Figure 2-1). In addition to water, discharges from the OESER Company have been known to contain wastes such as creosote, PCP, dioxins/furans (associated with PCP), diesel fuels, and related oil products. The wastewater/stormwater permit history for the OESER site is also presented in the OESER RI (E&E 2002a). Currently, OESER has a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Waste Discharge Permit (NPDES No. WA 003081-3) that allows detectable levels of PCP and petroleum hydrocarbons in effluent discharged to local stormwater.²

In addition to the OESER outfall, surface water runoff has been observed originating from the OESER yard and pooling in an area upstream of the “head” of the Creek (Wahl 2004, pers. comm.). The event occurred approximately 15 years ago, and soils and vegetation appeared to be impacted at the time from the contents of the runoff.

Stormwater drainage from the Birchwood neighborhood may also be a source of petroleum hydrocarbons and heavy metals to the Creek. A likely source of these contaminants is from motor vehicle and mixed commercial/residential use throughout this drainage area.

² The daily maximum effluent limitation is 9 µg/L for PCP.